Pancho Daniels, Highwayman

By John Pusateri

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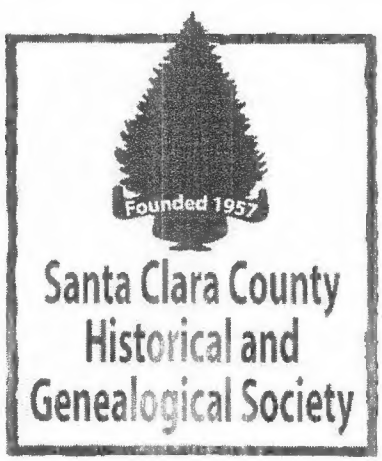
Notes:

- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara Historical and Genealogical Society



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"PANCHO DANIELS, HIGHWAYMAN"

Pancho Daniels, for some time after Joaquin Murrieta's death, was California's No. 1 bad man and highway robber. He was an ordinary looking little Mexican, young, with a smooth olive face and heavy lidded eyes. He carried himself with an easy air of superiority, though he had done nothing to entitle him to distinction. A good average robber - that was the best to be said of him. But he left his record in the pioneer days of the 1850's.

Pancho Daniels was not a native of Santa Clara county, but came from Los Angeles in the early fifties, and settled in San Jose when John Murphy was County Sheriff. He left town when he ran away with La Molinera, who was still Joaquin Murrieta's mistress, as the terror bandit was still alive at the time. Pancho Daniels brought his lady-love to Los Angeles, and remained with her until his passion for her cooled. Then, deserting Molinera, he returned to San Jose.

It was after Murrieta's death that Pancho Daniels carried out a series of successful robberies. His uncanny swiftness made men shiver when they heard he was around. They had seen one Mexican terrorize the state, and feared another had come to take his place, though his exploits were far from being as horrible in nature as those perpetrated by his predecessor.

Pancho Daniels was captured by Sheriff John Murphy and locked in the San Jose jail. The town was greatly excited by the presence of the outlaw, and was put on edge one day when news spread that Pancho had escaped.

Sheriff Murphy, with Constable Jacob Miller and Jasper D.

"PANCHO DANIELS, HIGHWAYMAN"

Gunn, the marshal, and William Lublette, deputy marshal, burned the roads after him. The whole town of San Jose soon took to the saddle, pounded through Market plaza, out North First street to a blind slough bridged at First and Taylor streets.

Constable Miller was riding in the lead when he got a glimpse of Pancho. A well-directed shot broke the robber's arm, another killed his horse. Pancho Daniels turned and snarled like a wounded animal. He lifted his gun and aimed it at the advancing official. This act must have put fear into the heart of Constable Miller, for he halted his horse in his tracks, turned, and spurred away, leaving the fugitive behind.

Pancho was soon lost in the mustard jungle which covered what was once called the Phelan tract, now the Vendome tract.

It was several days later that an Indian, acting in a suspicious manner, was shadowed by Sheriff Murphy. He soon learned that the Indian was carrying supplies to the outlaw. He was caught by the sheriff who bribed him into disclosing the fugitive's hide-out. He gave minute details, and leading the official into the mustard jungle, pointed to a hay-stack.

The hay-stack was entirely hidden in the mustard field, and when Sheriff Murphy neared it he gave warning to Pancho to come out, or he'd set fire to the hay-stack. At first there was no answer; but, on second warning, there was a movement under the hay. Then, forcing his way backward through a partly concealed hole, appeared Pancho Daniels.

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Sheriff Murphy ordered him to stand and walk toward him backwards. Pancho was handcuffed, placed in a wagon, and paraded back to San Jose. Many people saw the outlaw and were relieved that he was again in handcuffs. Children had a sort of admiration for Pancho, because he had frightened Constable Miller into flight.

Pancho Daniels was held in jail for several days, and then was taken, handcuffed, to Los Angeles, by Sheriff Murphy, where he was wanted for a series of robberies. When he was gone, San Jose felt easier and settled down to a normal existence.

Pancho Daniels was hung, along with several other law-breakers, by a group of infuriated citizens in Los Angeles, who took them from their cells before the authorities could act in their behalf.

CONSULTANT: Mrs. Fremont Older - "Life in Santa Clara County"